

COUNCILMEMBER HOWARD A. DENIS



NEWS FOR DISTRICT 1

Summer 2002

July 2002

Dear Neighbors,

I am pleased to present my second report about what's happening here at the County Council that affects our part of the County, District 1. Recently, the Council approved a \$2.9 billion Operating Budget for fiscal year 2003, which begins July 1, 2002, and a 6-year Capital Improvements Program.

Together the budgets emphasize education and transportation along with public safety and preserving open space. There is also a priority on enhancing security as a result of September 11. We and our neighbors in the Washington region must continue to work together.

If you have particular areas of interest regarding any budget item or issue, please call me at my Council office or check the County Council website at www.co.mo.md.us/council.

Having served in the Maryland State Senate for 18 years, I particularly appreciate the extent to which our ability to put together a balanced budget for Montgomery County has been facilitated by both state and federal assistance.

The following are some of the main areas which I have worked on this past year.

Transportation Priorities

In my view, the top transportation priorities for Montgomery County include a new east-west Metro line, the Inter-County Connector and the Corridor Cities Transitway. The Inter-County Connector along the Master Plan alignment is vital to improving east-west transportation between Montgomery and Prince George's County. I commended the action taken by the General Assembly to overwhelmingly pass a Joint Resolution encouraging the completion of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Inter-County Connector.

The Corridor Cities Transitway will reduce congestion on I-270 by linking Metro with areas north of Shady Grove, and should be the top mass transit priority for Montgomery County.

The State is evaluating a proposed new Metro line in Montgomery County, also known as the "Purple Line" to connect the spurs of the Red Line. Two alternative routes were discussed by the Council. Along with Councilmember "Ike" Leggett, I voted for an "outer line", due to my concern that the "inner line" would place the Capital Crescent Trail at risk.

Managing Growth

The Council passed an update to the Annual Growth Policy that restricted growth in areas with schools that are over capacity. This means that in areas where schools are at 100% capacity, future residential development will be halted until classroom space is increased.

The Annual Growth Policy also placed restrictions on parking at future developments near the White Flint and Grosvenor Metro Stations to ensure that those developments are truly "smart growth" and fully utilize mass transit.

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County Budget Highlights

The Council wrestled with budget decisions made more difficult by the recession and the aftermath of September 11. I am pleased to say we were able to adopt a budget that meets our needs. The following are a few highlights:

Funding boosted for Transit and Roads

- Restored funds for the Fare Share/Super Fare Share program that gives incentives to people who work in Montgomery County to use transit.
- Added funding to continue reduced and free bus fares in the I-270 corridor and Route 29.
- Added money to extend seniors' "Call-n-Ride" program and lower the eligibility age from 68 to 67.
- Funded a new Bethesda Commuter Store.

Growth

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Those developments will be required to pay for transit and road improvements.

I also supported the application of the County's Development Impact Tax to all areas of the County. The Impact Tax requires developers to pay for transit and road improvement needs. This funding will go to desperately needed transit and road projects and will more than double the funding available to address the County's transportation needs.

- Approved a grant for Bethesda Transportation Solutions.
- Included Chapman Avenue in the Capital Budget.

Fully funded the School Board's requested budget

- Expanded all-day kindergarten from 35 to 56 schools, with one teacher for every 15 children.
- Expanded the Class-size Initiative to all elementary schools with a high ratio of children receiving free or reduced meals.
- Added funds for the construction of gyms at elementary schools including Ashburton Elementary School and Somerset Elementary School.
- Strengthened math and reading programs at middle and high schools.
- Worked with the state delegation to bring home \$8.6 million more in state aid for schools than expected.

Restored and expanded Health & Human Services programs

- Approved funds to improve the Betty Ann Krahnke Center for victims of domestic violence.
- Increased funding for adult foster care and home care, and boosted respite care.
- Restored funding for the Parenting Resource Centers.
- Expanded transportation services to Senior Centers.

Maintained library hours and received a commitment for funds to re-open the Bethesda Library on schedule.

Preserved funding for park acquisition and community Recreation

- Maintained our commitment to enhance the Capital Crescent Trail.
- Restored funding for Legacy Open Space, so that Park and Planning can move to acquire and preserve critical properties, such as the Wolfarth property in Chevy Chase.
- Approved the final funding for the opening of the renovated Bethesda Pool.
- Restored funding for hours and staff at community recreation centers, including Scotland.
- Approved funds for Glen Echo Park operations.
- Included Concord Local Park in the Capital Budget.

Funded affordable housing Efforts

- Fully funded the Housing Initiative Fund.
- Restored funding for the Housing Opportunities Commission, including funds for the children's summer camp and a youth counselor position.
- Funded the Closing Cost Assistance Program.

Supported the Arts

- Worked with the State to have the Bethesda Central Business District designated as an Arts and Entertainment Center.
- Assisted the Bethesda Academy of Performing Arts with its new facility in Bethesda.
- Added funds for the Puppet Theatre in Glen Echo that benefits so many children in our area.



Councilmember Denis with County Executive Duncan announcing the transfer of Glen Echo Park management from the U.S. Park Service to the County.

Potomac Master Plan

On March 5, the Montgomery County Council approved a new Master Plan for the communities of Potomac, Darnestown, and North Potomac, collectively known as the Potomac Sub-region.

The County Council worked with the Planning Board and local neighborhoods on the first revision to the Potomac Sub-region Master Plan in twenty years. The Master Plan is a blueprint for land use decisions on transportation, parks and recreation, protection of water resources, and housing.

The Master Plan was a positive statement by the Council about controlling growth and protecting our most important water resource – the Potomac River. It accomplished this by preserving open space through the continuation of large lot zoning and limitations on public sewer. The Master Plan included several crucial intersection improvements, while maintaining the two-lane road policy. The Master Plan also rejected the so-called 'Techway,'

which would steamroller hundreds of homes and do next-to-nothing to address traffic congestion.

Master Plan Highlights

- Preserves Potomac's two-lane road policy.
- Maintains Potomac's role as a low-density buffer around the Potomac River, a critical water supply resource for the County and the region.
- Preserves more than 200 acres of critical environmental importance as parkland.
- Clarifies that Special Exception requirements in Potomac remain the same as requirements in the rest of the County.
- Establishes a clear "sewer envelope" to prevent the extension of sewer where inappropriate, and clarifies sewer policies for the planning area.
- Recommends sites for the North Potomac Community Center, new and expanded fire stations, and a regional services center satellite office.
- Recommends expansion of the Scotland Community Center.
- Allows intersection improvements on a case by case basis.

Summer Camps

Montgomery County is home to many private schools that offer summer day camps and other programs. The programs -- which include college preparation courses, arts classes, and performing arts programs -- enhance the quality of life in our community.

All of the private schools operated in residentially zoned land as special exceptions. As a result of a recent case before the County Board of Appeals, many of the schools found County law did not specifically authorize the programs they operated.

Following that case, I heard from a number of constituents asking that the Council act to preserve these programs. Most were concerned that their children would be unable to enroll for summer activities.

Private schools can be a great asset to the community, but they can also be seen as a burden - especially if traffic clogs up neighborhood streets. With that in mind, I was very attuned to the concerns of those who live near private schools.

To address these contrasting viewpoints, I co-sponsored a zoning text amendment (ZTA) to create a process for

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Camps

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private schools to seek approval for extracurricular programs. As co-sponsor, I had two goals in mind. First, I wanted to ensure programs were not summarily shut down due to a newly discovered gap in the law. Many private schools have operated programs for a long time, and should have a grace period. I also wanted to be certain that schools go through an approval process that involves neighbors.

The final ZTA approved by the Council addressed many points raised in the public testimony and indicates the Council took the community's concerns very seriously. The Council's action set up a process where neighborhoods are protected, and programs that meet the standards can continue. The ZTA provided two years for schools to work with their neighbors and receive approval from the County's Board of Appeals.

The ZTA authorized the Board of Appeals to take into consideration the total number of car trips generated by a school's regular program, and after school or summer programs in evaluating traffic impacts on surrounding neighborhoods. A limit on the number of program participants and frequency of large events may also be set.

"Out of Cycle" Property Tax Assessments Prohibited

I was very pleased with the vote of the Maryland General Assembly to reaffirm the triennial property tax assessments policy, and end the unfair practice by Montgomery County of appealing property tax assessments at mid-cycle. I initiated companion legislation on the County level after meeting with many families effected by the County's practice, and testified before the State Senate for enactment of Senator Brian Frosh's bill.

The bill received the overwhelming support of the Assembly, and was signed into law.